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Subject: In supporting the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, a struggling nonprofit confronts a conflict of interest

NC POLICY WATCH

Stories & voices
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In supporting the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, a struggling nonprofit confronts a conflict of interest

By [Lisa Sorg](#)

For the 18 months, Gary Brown has been traveling through northeastern North Carolina like an itinerant preacher, singing the praises of the [Atlantic Coast Pipeline](#).

"Atlantic's decision to place its operations center in Northampton County is impressive and certainly welcomed," he told the Roanoke-Chowan *Herald* in March 2016. "The project is critically important in serving the energy needs of residents, business and industry in the state and region, present and future. We appreciate the opportunity to be a part of that, and the trust they have placed in us."

At public hearings in Jackson and Rocky Mount, Brown urged state environmental officials to approve the ACP's water quality certification application, claiming the project would create jobs.

One could argue that as the executive director of the [Northampton County Economic Development Commission](#) for the past 25 years, Brown was simply doing his job: trying to attract industry to an economically depressed part of the state.

But while promoting the controversial project, Brown failed to disclose an important conflict of interest: He is the board president of a nonprofit that made the short list of grant recipients of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline Foundation.

According to documents reviewed by Policy Watch, in 2016, Brown's nonprofit, the [North Carolina Center for Automotive Research](#), was being considered for a \$5,000 grant for "site logistics, safety and program support."

The center touts itself as a place for engineers to test vehicles, but is essentially a race track for cars and motorcycles. Yet the proposed grant amount put the center on financial par with three community- and education-oriented nonprofits: The Garysburg Volunteer Public Library, the Lake Gaston Community Center and the Gaston College Prep-KIPP, all of which were also under consideration to receive \$5,000.

The foundation is funded by the pipeline's owners: Dominion Energy, Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas and Southern Company Gas. It has been awarding community investment grants to nonprofits and other groups along the pipeline route.

Such funding strategies are a common, albeit contentious practice for many industries. While the awardees financially benefit in the short-term, the corporate giving can also be viewed as a method of dampening opposition and buying support. [\[Read more...\]](#)

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